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SUBJECT: MALAWI CONSIDERS SENDING BATTALION TO SOMALIA

¶1. (SBU) Malawi is considering sending a 538-man battalion of peace-keepers to join an African Union force in Somalia. The Malawi Defense Force (MDF) had been focused on preparations to send a battalion to the UN/AU mission in the Sudan but was very recently asked by the AU to join a forthcoming mission to Somalia instead. The battalion would consist of three rifle/infantry companies, one reserve platoon, and a headquarters company. This would be the largest peace-keeping deployment ever for the MDF, and add to the over 100 peace-keepers the MDF currently has deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

¶2. (SBU) Poloff met with MDF Director of Military Operations Brigadier Mecres Chinjala on January 11, who outlined the steps the MDF will have to take to join the mission to Somalia. Though the AU has pledged to provide some equipment to the MDF, including, notably, Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs) donated by Canada, the MDF will still be required to come up with a significant amount of its own equipment. Chinjala said that he expects to travel to Addis Ababa to discuss the specifics of the equipment required for, as well as location of, the deployment sometime before mid-February. After this meeting the Ministry of Defense and the MDF will decide whether or not to make a hard commitment to the mission.

¶3. (SBU) Similarly, the Malawians are concerned at the command and control aspects of the Somalia mission, according to Ben Mbewe, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Mbewe told the Ambassador January 12 that the division of command responsibility between the AU and IGADD needed to be clarified, hinting that a mandate with clear command vested in the AU would be preferable to IGADD assuming this role.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: The key to the MDF's decision on whether or not to deploy will come down to its equipment levels. Chinjala said that beyond what the AU will provide, the MDF still expects to have an equipment shortfall, specifically in the areas of unarmored/lightly armored 4 x 4 vehicles and field equipment such as tents and field kitchens. We expect to receive a request for assistance with items such as these within the next two weeks. If the MDF is indeed able to deploy, it will be a large step forward for the MDF in the field of international peace-keeping. The Mission has made peacekeeping deployments a priority of all our interactions with the MDF, and it is an encouraging sign that they now

appear close to putting a battalion, albeit a small one, in the field. End Comment.

EASTHAM